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FOR THE SECRETARY FROM AMBASSADOR YOVANOVITCH

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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER -- ARMENIA AND THE OCTOBER 10 SIGNING
OF PROTOCOLS WITH TURKEY

REF: ANKARA 1432

Classified By: Ambassador Marie L. Yovanovitch, reasons 1.5(b,d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (S) For Armenia, the October 10 signing of the normalization protocols with Turkey in Zurich represents the culmination of President Sargsian's boldest foreign initiative, and one that carries significant political risk. Sargsian is under heavy fire by nationalists and political opposition at home and from many in the Armenian diaspora for allegedly "selling out" Armenia's historical claims and undermining efforts to achieve international recognition of the Armenian "genocide." Many have called for the resignation of FM Nalbandian, who will sign the agreements with his Turkish counterpart. Your presence at the ceremony will have enormous significance for the Armenians, who view the United States as the "guarantor" of the normalization process and are counting on the U.S. to ensure that the protocols are implemented. Armenian leaders remain skeptical of Turkish motives and worried that the Turkish parliament will not ratify the protocols in the face of pressure from Azerbaijan. The President has told us that a delay in ratification on the Turkish side will weaken his position at home. The signing ceremony affords the opportunity for you to reinforce U.S. support for Armenia's commitment to normalization, praise the political courage of President Sargsian and FM Nalbandian for staying the course in the face of virulent opposition, and encourage the GOAM to proceed with ratification as soon as possible. Finally, you should reiterate to Nalbandian that while we view the NK process as separate from normalization, a constructive approach by Armenia in Minsk Group discussions would be positive for its own sake and make it easier for Turkey to ratify the protocols. End Summary.

ARMENIA TAKES A RISK WITH TURKEY

¶2. (S) The prospect of normalization of relations with Turkey has captured the attention of the Armenian nation -- those in Armenia as well in the diaspora -- as no other issue since Armenia's independence. The angry demonstrations against President Sargsian by diaspora groups in Paris, New York, and Los Angeles are the tip of a much larger iceberg. Armenian blogs -- mostly in the diaspora -- are full of vitriol against the Government, branding the President and Foreign Minister as "traitors" prepared to "sell out" the interests

of Armenians, particularly their historical claims against Turkey and the push for international recognition of the "genocide." Although other diaspora organizations have spoken out in support of the protocols, a position we believe is shared by most Armenians in Armenia, the furor of the naysayers clearly has the President rattled.

13. (S) Your presence in Zurich is critical as a visible demonstration of U.S. support for the normalization process and for the embattled Armenian leadership. Your praise for Armenia's steadfastness in the face of risk and encouragement to stay the course will go a long way in shoring up the Government's determination to move forward. Although the Swiss have mediated from the beginning, the Armenians have increasingly viewed the U.S. as the "guarantor" in the process and believe that only continued engagement by the U.S. with the GOT can ensure that the protocols are ratified and implemented in a reasonable timeframe. Sargsian has told us that his "nightmare scenario" is a long delay between signing and Turkish ratification and implementation, because it will be hard to maintain support for normalization in the face of overwhelming Armenian skepticism.

ARMENIA TO RATIFY, BUT WHEN?

14. (S) There is little question that the Armenian National Assembly has the votes to ratify the protocols with Turkey. The President and his coalition partners have a commanding majority, and Armenian MPs rarely deviate from the President's script. FM Nalbandian and others outside the Government, however, have told us that the GOAM may await action by the Turkish Parliament before moving forward. From an Oriental point of view, they argue, a quick ratification by Armenia followed by a long delay on the Turkish side will be seen as a humiliation for the GOAM. We have argued strongly that this would be a mistake -- early ratification by Armenia will ensure that, whatever the outcome in Turkey, everyone understands that the GOAM did all it could to achieve normalization. A delay in parliamentary action by Yerevan will give the Turks a welcome justification to stall the process as well. It would be useful for you to push FM Nalbandian for immediate submission and support of the protocols for ratification -- just as we are asking the Turks to do.

NK PROCESS: SEPARATE, BUT IMPORTANT

15. (S) The Armenians have been adamant from the start that the Turkey-Armenia process is entirely separate from efforts to find a resolution to the Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict, a position that you have supported publicly. Statements by senior Turkish officials, especially PM Erdogan, that implementation of the protocols is contingent on an NK solution have infuriated the GOAM and reduced Sargsian's short-term room to maneuver in the Minsk Group talks. As Embassy Ankara has reported, however, political reality in Turkey will require something that the GOT can point to as "progress" on NK if the protocols are to have any chance of being ratified by the Turkish side.

16. (S) While repeating our view that the processes are separate, you should also make clear to Nalbandian that a constructive approach by Armenia in Minsk Group discussions will be beneficial for its own sake, and will increase the likelihood that the Turks can achieve ratification of the protocols. We need to be clear, however, that "progress" is not the same as "unilateral concessions by Armenia," and recognize explicitly that we will also expect Aliyev to be constructive even though he may see it in Azerbaijan's short-term interest to obstruct in order to prevent Turkey-Armenia normalization. As embassies Yerevan and Baku have reported, there is little ground on either side to expect a "breakthrough" on NK in the near term. You should reassure Nalbandian that we will engage with the Turks and

Azerbaijanis to ensure that NK "progress" is defined in a realistic way in the context of the ongoing Minsk Group discussions.

YOVANOVITCH